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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASTANA 002042

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: AMBASSADOR'S INITIAL CALLS ON  
RUSSIAN AND CHINESE AMBASSADORS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland, 1.4 (B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador called on Chinese Ambassador Cheng Guoping on October 14 and joined Russian Ambassador Mikhail Nikolayevich Bocharnikov for lunch at his Embassy on October 15. Although both were rather formal on first meeting, Ambassador Cheng seemed the somewhat less guarded. Both complained their Foreign Ministries experience difficulties attracting "quality diplomats" to Astana. END SUMMARY.

CHINA: SECURITY, ENERGY, RUSSIA/GEORGIA

12. (C) Ambassador Cheng said in Beijing,s view, Kazakhstan is the third most important country in China,s security interests, after Russia, first, and India, second. He emphasized Kazakhstan,s and China,s long common border, and alluded to Beijing,s security concerns about separatists in Xianjian Province. He characterized the Kazakhstani-Chinese mil-mil relationship as "positive with the potential to grow," and the special services relationship as "correct, with no special problems." As a second priority after security, Cheng listed economic relations and specifically energy -- Kazakhstan,s oil and natural gas.

13. (C) With a highly Russo-centric view, Ambassador Cheng recapped the Georgia events in August: "(Georgian President Mikhail) Saakashvili invaded Tskhinvali and killed thousands." The Ambassador responded he is aware of that interpretation and recognized that Russia had the right to protect its "peace keepers," if they were under imminent threat. He emphasized the United States had repeatedly counseled restraint by Georgia in response to Russian provocation. He suggested that China might want to consider a more nuanced view because the Russian military action effectively changed the borders in the post-Soviet space by force and could well have unleashed the "evil of separatism/splitism" about which China is deeply concerned. Ambassador Cheng did not respond directly, but seemed to take the point.

14. (C) Ambassador Cheng asked if Secretary Rice, during her October 5 visit to Astana, had asked Kazakhstan for special support against Russia. The Ambassador gave Cheng an

extensive read-out of the Secretary,s meetings and said her statement during her joint media opportunity with Foreign Minister Tazhin clearly stated U.S. policy: the United States is not competing for the affections of countries in the region. The Ambassador elaborated long-standing U.S. policy that the United States supports the independence and sovereignty of the Central Asian states and respects their right to choose their own partners; we do not recognize anyone,s special or privileged sphere of influence in the region.

¶15. (C) Ambassador Cheng, who had just arrived and presented his credentials on October 8 along with the Ambassador and five others, said he had been sent to Astana specifically to get China,s new chancery and staff apartment housing built -- across the street from the U.S. Embassy, although he confided there are still "technical problems" about the legal right to the land. Nearly the first words out of his mouth were apologies for his Embassy's temporary quarters in a run-of-the-mill office building. He bemoaned the difficulty of attracting good Chinese diplomats to Astana because of his Embassy,s current working and living conditions.

¶16. (C) COMMENT: Ambassador Cheng went out of his way several times to emphasize his desire to maintain close dialog with the Ambassador. He speaks rudimentary, highly accented Russian and no English. He preferred to conduct the meeting with a Chinese Embassy staff member translating Mandarin-English. He had two other note-takers present who clearly understood English. END COMMENT.

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RUSSIA: CORRECT BUT NOT SUBSTANTIVE

¶17. (C) In response to the Ambassador,s request for an early courtesy call, Russian Ambassador Mikhail Nikolayevich Bocharnikov invited him to a one-on-one lunch at the Russian Embassy on October 15. When the Ambassador thanked him for this special courtesy, Bocharnikov responded that he wanted to reciprocate former U.S. Ambassador Ordway,s kindness of inviting him soon after his arrival to Astana in 2006 to a private lunch at the U.S. Embassy Residence. Despite Bocharnikov,s tenure as the Moscow-based Russian Special Ambassador for Abkhazia (2003-2006), he deflected all substantive questions on all issues. The Ambassador briefed him on Secretary Rice,s October 5 visit to Astana and discussed the U.S. presidential election.

¶18. (C) Russia opened its new Embassy in Astana in 2004. The relatively small compound closer to the old city center than to the new Kazakhstani government core, includes the chancery, a large recreation center -- sports courts, billiard hall, 20-meter swimming pool, and very large sauna facilities -- and an eight-story apartment building for Embassy diplomats and their families. Bocharnikov, like his Chinese colleague, said his Foreign Ministry has a hard time attracting "quality diplomats" to Astana. Having begun his diplomatic career in 1971, he commented that he is old-school Soviet Union, "where people followed orders," and can,t get fully used to the idea that younger Russian diplomats "now seem to think they have choices."

¶19. (C) In response to the Ambassador,s probing that he has heard rumors Russia has acquired the land across the side street from the U.S. Embassy for a new Russian Embassy complex, Bocharnikov admitted Russia has the land "in principle," but will likely use it in the nearer term to build more Russian Embassy housing and "other facilities."

¶10. (C) COMMENT: It is encouraging that Ambassador Bocharnikov took the initiative to develop a one-on-one relationship with the Ambassador, who praised to Bocharnikov former Russian Ambassador to Tajikistan and current Russian Foreign Ministry Director for Central Asia Maksim Peshkov,s candor and collegiality. Compared to Peshkov,s successor in

Dushanbe, the snide nationalist Abdulatipov, and the relatively reclusive, bloated, and mono-syllabic Ambassador Blatov in Ashgabat, Bocharnikov is a small breath of fresh air, even if quite clearly old-school.

¶11. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: The lunch took place in the Russian chancery in what Ambassador Bocharnikov said was designed to be the Ambassador,s apartment but is now used, minimally furnished, mainly as temporary quarters for high-level visiting Russian officials. Bocharnikov currently lives in a relatively small villa in "dip-gorodok," a foreign diplomatic gated community surrounding the Presidential Administration,s Rixos Hotel. Bocharnikov confided that his predecessor had refused to live on the Russian compound, and he has done the same, but is dissatisfied because he,d prefer a "proper residence commensurate with Russia,s status in Kazakhstan." Bocharnikov, while giving the Ambassador a tour of the public spaces for the Russian chancery, subtly criticized his predecessor for having bought generic art -- "Motel 6 landscapes" -- to decorate the public rooms: "Hsimply went to an artist,s studio and bought the whole lot." END COMMENT.  
HOAGLAND